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'He is a better scholar than I thought he was': debating the achievements of the Elizabethan grammar schools

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[1] For many decades now literary scholars have assumed that the great flowering of literature that took place in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had its roots in a humanist educational revolution. This revolution, such scholars have surmised, made a knowledge of classical literature and a training in classical languages and rhetoric newly available to boys from a relatively wide social spectrum via the establishment of many new grammar schools in towns across the realm. Many grammar-school boys, such as Christopher Marlowe, George Peele, and Edmund Spenser, proceeded to university, where they received yet more instruction in this body of humanist literary knowledge and linguistic skills; but some did not, including Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Kyd, and, famously, William Shakespeare, implying that an Elizabethan grammar-school education alone was sufficient to set a talented boy on the path to literary greatness (see Appendix). Yet some historians of this period of education have found the schooling offered in these institutions to be authoritarian, supportive of existing hierarchies rather than social mobility, and repressive of creativity. This article will explore how we might make sense of the disparity between the literary-critical and social-historical views of the Elizabethan grammar schools, and how this might help us to understand the foundations of the writing careers of authors born and educated in the Elizabethan period.

[2] After a grounding in basic literacy at petty school, boys entered the grammar school in the 'lower school', where between the ages of seven and twelve they principally learned Latin grammar. This was supported from the second form onwards by the use of examples from Latin authors and exercises in dialogue. From the third form to the fifth form pupils practised imitation of such models as Cicero, Terence, and Ovid, and began to progress into composition; in support of this they kept commonplace books recording potentially useful passages from their reading. Then in the 'upper school', taking them up to the age of sixteen, students were trained in rhetoric and logic and continued their study of Latin literature, adding in authors such as Virgil and Horace. It was a curriculum indebted to Quintilian and Erasmus which foregrounded the rhetorical skills of *inventio* (identifying arguments and evidence), *dispositio* (organising those materials), *elocutio* (embellishing arguments with tropes and figures), *memoria* (the skill of memorising a speech), and *pronuntiatio* (oral delivery) (Vickers 1989: 28, 62-7). Some time was also given to other subjects such as Greek and mathematics. There were variations between schools, but this was the broad outline of the Elizabethan syllabus (Kempe 1588: 226-37; Mack 2002: 9, 11-47; Rhodes 2004: locs 648-69, 705; Dolven 2007: 21-5).

[3] Biographies of early modern authors almost routinely trace the origins of their mature art back to their grammar-school education. Ian Donaldson, for instance, in his *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Jonson, finds the roots of his subject's later career at Westminster School – refounded by Elizabeth I in 1560 – under the renowned master William Camden:

Jonson benefited deeply from the school's traditions of rhetorical and classical training, and, in particular, from the exercise of rendering Greek and Latin verse and prose into their equivalent English forms. Camden, who had a good knowledge of earlier English poetry, seems also to have encouraged his boys to write verses of their own in English.

Camden was one of a number of Elizabethan teachers who included drama in their curriculum, with obvious benefits for a future playwright:

Through the Latin play, a regular event in the life of Westminster School, Jonson had early experience in a medium he was eventually to make his own. He was to retain a special fondness for the comedies of Plautus and Terence which were commonly performed on these occasions, and for the school's traditions of dramatic performance. (Donaldson: 2004)

Jonson presents a particularly striking case of the potential outcome of a grammar-school education because in later life he was justly celebrated for his impressive classical learning, despite not having proceeded to university.

[4] His friend and rival Shakespeare also went no further than grammar school in his education. The King's New School in Stratford-upon-Avon had medieval origins, but was re-founded by King Edward VI in 1553 ('History of the School' 2011). There is no documentary record of Shakespeare's attendance there, but his biographers agree that he must have been one of its pupils (e.g. Holland 2004; Potter 2012: 21-39). Jonson was somewhat patronising, in his prefatory poem for the 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, about his fellow author's 'small Latin and less Greek' (Shakespeare 2016: A28), no doubt because of his pride in his own erudition. However in a detailed study of 1944 that quoted Jonson in its title (*William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Less Greeke*) T. W. Baldwin gave a thorough account of the rigour and richness of the school curriculum that Shakespeare would have followed. Building on this, many scholars have traced the foundations of Shakespeare's art in his education. Lois Potter, for instance, in her biography of Shakespeare made a similar point to Donaldson's about Jonson, observing that 'the heavily classical education' imparted at grammar school was 'an almost ideal training' for a writer, and especially for a dramatist, because of the prominence of the Latin playwrights Terence and Plautus in the early stages of the grammar-school curriculum, and because of the use of various kinds of performance in pedagogic practice (2012: 31-2, 33-5; see also Rhodes 2004: locs 315-45).

[5] Such biographical observations find an obvious and direct relationship between the training in languages, rhetoric, literature, and performance that Shakespeare and his contemporaries received at school and their later proficiency as poets and playwrights. Meanwhile other critics have developed more complex hypotheses about the cause-and-effect relationship between the Elizabethan grammar-school syllabus and the literary achievements of the period. Joel B. Altman's 1978 book *The Tudor Play of Mind*, for instance, emphasised the prominence in schoolroom rhetorical training of exercises in disputation and debate, developing the ability to argue either or both sides of a case, *in utramque partem*. This, Altman argued, could account for the extraordinarily multivocal and interrogative qualities of Renaissance drama:

the plays are essentially questions and not statements at all [...] the plays functioned as media of intellectual and emotional exploration for minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a given theme, to entertain opposing ideals, and by so exercising the understanding, to move toward some fuller apprehension of truth that could be ascertained only through the total action of the drama. (6; see also Rhodes 2004: locs 1057-1446)

Jonathan Bate then pointed to Shakespeare's introduction to Ovid at grammar school as a formative moment which established a lifelong affinity, building on Baldwin's identification of 'something of [Shakespeare's] inmost self which he found in Ovid's inmost self' (1944: II: 673). For Bate, imitating Ovid taught Shakespeare how to simulate full human personality in language:

The Ovidian and the Shakespearian self is always in motion, always in pursuit or flight [...] The Ovidian dramatic monologue and the Shakespearian soliloquy create the illusion that a fictional being has an interior life. This illusion is achieved principally by the arts of language. The character's 'self' is both created and transformed by the very process of verbal articulation; her or his 'being' is invented rhetorically. (Bate 1993: locs 114-17, 136)

A few years later Alison Thorne, in *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare* (2000), a book full of illuminating insights and in many ways ahead of its time, explored the intersections in Shakespeare's works between rhetoric and Renaissance theories of representation in the visual arts. She found that rhetorical theory provided 'a common denominator between poetry and painting,' and 'proposed a model of persuasive discourse in which language could be understood to operate as if it were a mode of perception' (xiv). She understood Shakespeare's knowledge of rhetoric as grounded in 'the indelible traces' of the 'humanistic educational system', especially the influence of Erasmus's grammar-school textbook *De Copia* (9, and see 21, 59). In short, it was his education that gave him the tools to create what Thorne calls, in a wonderfully succinct and expressive phrase, 'the referential density of Shakespeare's fictive worlds' (102).

[6] Neil Rhodes, in his brilliant study of *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* (2004), took a similar view that 'We will obviously never know how Shakespeare's mind worked, but we can still reconstruct the ways in which his mind may have been trained to work' (loc 1225). He traced back to the Elizabethan grammar-school curriculum Shakespeare's abilities to recreate spoken language in writing, to write original works based on a training in imitation, to problematise issues, to develop English as a literary language, and to draw on the knowledge-management and retrieval skills encouraged by the keeping of commonplace books. Raphael Lyne in *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition* (2011) then contended that Shakespeare's rhetorical training enabled him to represent the thought-processes of his characters – especially the difficulty of putting emotions, experiences, and mental processes into words – in ways which resonate fascinatingly with modern theories of cognition; while Lorna Hutson has recently proposed that Shakespeare's ability to imply realistic lives, worlds, and personalities for his characters beyond the text depended on his deployment of the rhetorical 'places' or 'circumstances' which formed an important part of 'elementary grammar school exercises':

[I]f we consider time, place, and causa (motive or purpose) as three of the most important rhetorical topics of circumstance, we can begin to see that it is Shakespeare's innovative concern with the probable invention of arguments on these topics that has enabled generations of readers to infer from them the subjective experience and psychological depth to which we have given the name of 'character'. (2015: 58, 43-4)

[7] Thus a number of intellectually powerful and sophisticated efforts to identify and analyze what makes Shakespeare's writing exceptional, and why the English Renaissance produced such an exceptional generation of writers, have found answers in the knowledge and skills imparted by the Elizabethan grammar schools. Yet if we look back over histories of education written over the same period of scholarship, we find a surprisingly different story. Rosemary O'Day, writing in 1982, found that 'after an opening up of educational facilities to a broad section of the community in the 1560s, there was a certain closing up of educational opportunity thereafter' (35). She continued:

the improvement in educational provision was the intensification of an existing trend rather than a dramatic development which emerged 'out of the blue' with the Renaissance. There was a rise in the number of schools in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods but this rise was not sudden, nor was it entirely due to

the impact of Renaissance conviction that gentlemen must be properly educated to serve the state. (42)

She emphasised that rote-learning such as the use of catechisms 'was part of the fabric of the learning process in medieval and early modern England: it was common at every level, ABC School, grammar school, university; it placed a premium on memorising accepted thought and frowned upon free thinking' (44). Classrooms were cramped and crowded, and compliance was frequently enforced by beating (59, 49). Children were sent to school primarily to learn 'to become a good Christian and a good citizen', and the gentry and professional classes 'increasingly saw education as the way to confirm rather than to modify the ramifications of the hierarchical social structure' (50, 64). Education, O'Day asserted, was regarded as a tool to inculcate loyalty to the state and to new religious doctrines, and to create useful members of society. Hence "Creativity", individual development, free expression were concepts unknown to the Tudor and Stuart educator' (75).

[8] This sounds far less promising – even the opposite of beneficial – as a training ground for future authors from humble backgrounds. A similarly negative view was taken by Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine in their polemical book *From Humanism to the Humanities* (1986). They accepted that 'between 1450 and 1650 there was a vast growth in the numbers of those involved in education at every level from the barely literate to the professional scholar', and that this constituted an 'Educational Revolution' (xi). However they argued that humanism, after its early idealism and intellectual innovation, became debased by classroom practice into 'a curriculum training a social elite to fulfil its predetermined social role', 'an ideology of routine, order and above all "method"' (xvi, 123). The 'promise held out to parents and prospective patrons' was that children would be instructed in virtuous – that is, obedient – conduct as much as grammar (143). Humanist education came to serve a new Europe

with its closed governing élites, hereditary offices and strenuous efforts to close off debate on vital political and social questions [...] it offered everyone a model of true culture as something given, absolute, to be mastered, not questioned – and thus fostered in all its initiates a properly docile attitude towards authority (xiv).

The historical narratives offered by O'Day and Grafton and Jardine pose serious challenges to the idea that grammar-school education was the foundation of the bold creative innovations of Shakespeare, Jonson, and their contemporaries, and have been supported by other historians of education. Michael Van Cleave Alexander questioned the novelty of humanist educational developments in the Elizabethan period: 'what seemed to have been an "educational revolution" after 1558 was in fact the culmination of an evolutionary process already more than two centuries old' (1990: ix); while Helen M. Jewell summarised that '[a]n educational revolution, located between 1560 and 1640, has been challenged as only intermittent, and largely confined to higher education. Certainly this period was not one of steady overall progress in terms of scholarship or even of basic literacy' (1998: 6).

[9] How are we to account for this gulf between different academic discourses? One clue lies in that phrase 'educational revolution' which we find repeated by Grafton and Jardine (1986: xi), Alexander (1990: ix), and Jewell (1998: 6). This derives from a seminal article of 1964 by Lawrence Stone, 'The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640', which compiled some statistical and documentary evidence for educational developments in England over the specified period. In fact the article mainly attends to higher education rather than grammar schools, and gives a fairly nuanced if brief account of changes at school level. Nevertheless its title makes a polemical claim, and Stone does contend that a 'proliferation of little private schools means that the growth of secondary education at this period was far greater – perhaps twice as great – as the increase of places at endowed

grammar schools would suggest' (47). He also draws exuberant conclusions that, because of advances in education, early modern England 'boiled and bubbled with new ideas as no other country in Europe', with 'widespread public participation in significant intellectual debate on every front' (80). As a whole, the article seems to have operated as a provocation to some other historians who sought to re-evaluate or contest its claims.

[10] A significant factor in the movement against Stone's 'educational revolution' may have been the topical political context of the 1976 Education Act which swept away the national system of selective state grammar schools set up in 1944 (except for a few survivals in a few local pockets). O'Day cautioned responsibly that 'It is all too easy to look at the Tudor-Stuart educational scene and equate the ABC and Petty schools with the primary schools of today, and the grammar schools with the present-day secondary schools. Such was not the case' (1982: 26). Nevertheless negative accounts of Elizabethan education by O'Day and others may well have been inflected by their own context, when institutions bearing the name 'grammar school' – and not entirely unlike their sixteenth-century predecessors in their associations with training in 'traditional' subjects such as Latin, with academic elitism, and with preparation for university – had come to be seen as outmoded and socially divisive, and had mostly been abolished within the state education system. (Meanwhile some pre-1944 schools with 'grammar' in their name, such as Manchester Grammar School, which had come into the state system as part-funded 'direct grant' schools, now left it again and reverted to independent status.) When Stone published his article in 1964 free state grammar schools were still seen as vehicles for widening access to academic training and creating an upwardly mobile meritocracy, but by the 1980s and '90s this project had been largely abandoned.

[11] A helpful middle way through the debate about the impact and value of the Elizabethan grammar schools is offered by the most thorough statistical investigation to date of early modern literacy, David Cressy's *Literacy and the Social Order* (1980). Cressy found that the spread of literacy remained limited through the early modern period, and that Stone had over-simplified in asserting consistent educational progress over the period 1560-1640. He offered much more detail on forward and backward movements in particular decades, regions, and occupational groups. Nevertheless, he concluded that 'Every indicator confirms the period from 1560 to 1580 as one of educational revolution' and connected this with the 'proliferation' of grammar schools. Although after 1580 there was an 'educational recession', prior to this 'the bulk of the evidence, strengthened by the literacy figures, points to the first two decades of Elizabeth's reign as a period of unusual educational excitement and achievement'. Cressy notes that these were the decades when Shakespeare, his literary contemporaries, and much of their audience and readership were educated (168-9). Adding more precision to Stone's account, then, need not disrupt the hypothesis that the late Elizabethan literary revolution was grounded in an early Elizabethan educational revolution.

[12] It is also helpful to break down the critique of Elizabethan grammar schools into its constituent points and consider them one by one. Four main objections to the concept of an educational revolution have been mounted: first, that the Elizabethan grammar schools were not an entirely new phenomenon, but rather a continuation of developments begun in the Middle Ages; secondly, that they did little to foster social mobility; thirdly, that they relied heavily on rote-learning and corporal punishment as teaching methods; and finally, that they inculcated conformity and conventional thinking rather than creativity and intellectual innovation. Let us consider each of these in turn.

[13] On the first point: it is true that some of the leading schools in England were founded before the reign of Elizabeth. Winchester College, for instance, was set up in the late fourteenth century; Eton College in 1440; St Paul's School, London, in 1509; and Manchester Grammar School in 1515. A number of schools were also founded or refounded

during the reign of Elizabeth's brother Edward VI, often replacing establishments connected to monasteries or chantries; many such schools still bear his name, as in Birmingham, Chelmsford, and Stratford-upon-Avon. Yet statistical evidence does suggest that, even if some grammar schools were up and running before the Elizabethan period, there was unprecedented expansion at this time. Joan Simon noted that numerous schools were founded or refounded in the 1560s, both in London and across the regions, including Westminster (1560), Hoddesdon (1560), Merchant Taylors' (1561), Friar's School, Bangor (1561), Tonbridge (1564), Penrith (1564), Darlington (1567), and many more (1977: 302-16). Corroborating this sense of a recognisable movement, Alexander records that during the Elizabethan period more than £250,000 was contributed to school endowments and 130 new schools were founded, giving a national total of 360 grammar schools by 1603 (1990: 185). Moreover the Elizabethans clearly regarded themselves as living through an educational revolution. In the 'Description of Britaine' that he contributed to the 1577 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, William Harrison stated that:

there are great number of Grammer scholes thorowe out the Realme, and those very lyberally indued, for the better reliefe of poore schollers, so that there are not many corporate townes now vnder the Queenes dominion, that hath not one Gramerschoole at the least, with a sufficient liuing for a Mayster and Vsher, appointed to the same. (80)

We should also take note of the observations of Richard Mulcaster, headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' School from 1561 to 1586, and high-master of St Paul's from 1596 to 1608 (Barker 2004). Mulcaster taught Thomas Kyd, Thomas Lodge, and Edmund Spenser at Merchant Taylors', and has been described as 'the most undervalued contributor to the English literary renaissance' (Rhodes 2004: loc 1549). In his 1581 educational manual *Positions* he noted that 'during the time of her Maiesties most fortunate raigne already, there hath bene mo schooles erected, then all the rest be, that were before her time in the whole Realme' (229).

[14] On the second question, whether the grammar schools advanced social mobility, the examples of pupils who went on to successful literary careers present suggestive evidence. The Appendix below compiles information from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* concerning the educational histories of the most well-known authors born and/or educated during the reign of Elizabeth. This sample is obviously limited and specialised, but does suggest social range in the grammar-school intake, extending from members of the higher gentry or lower aristocracy like Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville (pupils together at Shrewsbury School) to poor scholars like Lodge, Marlowe, and Spenser. It is particularly notable how many writers attended grammar school from origins in the artisan and tradesman classes: not only the glover's son Shakespeare and the bricklayer's stepson Johnson, but also Kyd, son of a scrivener; Robert Greene, son of a saddler, cordwainer, or innkeeper; Lodge, son of a grocer; Marlowe, of a shoemaker; and so on. These were not the destitute poor, nor did careers as authors necessarily confer social respectability or wealth, but evidence from this occupational cohort suggests that the aspirant artisan classes were keen to send their sons to grammar school and saw advantages in doing so.

[15] There is substantial evidence that, once at school, these gifted pupils and their classmates would have been subjected to extensive rote-learning. The school day was long, starting at 6 or 7am and ending at 5 or 6pm, with a mid-day break for dinner, and shorter breaks at 9am and 3pm. Alexander observes that 'it was not at all unusual for teachers and pupils to spend ten hours a day at school, six days a week'. Schools varied in size: many took around 50 to 80 boys, but some had as many as 350 pupils. They were usually all housed in one large room, seated on rows of benches or 'forms' arranged in order of age-group. The master might be assisted by one or more ushers, who would work particularly with the

younger forms. These were self-evidently difficult teaching conditions, with each teacher typically having responsibility for between 50 and 70 pupils (Dolven 2007: 19; Alexander 1990: 198-9). Mass drilling rather than individual tuition must inevitably have been the norm, reinforced by injunctions from the government to use prescribed standard text-books such as Alexander Nowell's *Catechism* and William Lily's *Latin Grammar*.

[16] There is also extensive evidence that corporal punishment was used to inculcate diligent study and good behaviour. Thomas Tusser recalled being flogged at Eton in the 1530s by the headmaster Nicholas Udall:

From Powels I went, to Aeton sent,
To learne straight wayes, the Latine phrayes,
Where fyfty three, strippes geuen to me,
_____ at once I had:
For fawt but small, or none at all,
yt cam to pas, thus beat I was,
Se Wdall se, the mercy of the
_____ to me poore lad. (Tusser 1573: 90^f)

Mulcaster wrote that 'the rod may no more be spared in schooles, then the sworde may in the Princes hand', explicitly connecting discipline in school with the maintenance of order and authority in the state (1581: 277); and Edmund Coote, master of King Edward VI Free School in Bury St Edmunds, included the following verses in his text-book *The English schoole-maister* (1596):

My child and scholer, take good heed,
_____ vnto the words which here are set:
And see you do accordingly,
_____ or els be sure you shall be beat. (63-4; O'Day 1982: 49)

[17] It is difficult to determine how frequently the rod was actually administered, or merely invoked as a threat, as in Coote's verses. Practice may have varied between schools and between masters, and some may have used the rod only as a disciplinary method of last resort. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in a scene considered in more detail below, the parson-schoolmaster Evans threatens his pupil William with beating – 'if you forget your *quis*, your *ques*, and your *quods*, you must be preeches' – but does not administer it, and indeed immediately afterwards tells William rather affectionately and indulgently, 'Go your ways and play, go' (IV. 1. 68-10). William Kempe, master of Plymouth Grammar School and author of *The education of children in learning* (1588), maintained like Mulcaster that 'the discipline and vertuous bringing vp of children in good learning is the very foundation and groundworke of all good in euery estate aswell priuate as publike', and that 'the vnthrifte [...] and those that do amisse' should be 'reformed and corrected'. However the rod was only to be inflicted if all other methods had failed: an offender should first be 'admonished, then rebuked: herein the cause shall be throughly sifted, patiently heard, by equitie iudged, and last of all soundly reproofed, that the conscience of the offender may be touched for the fault'. Even if the offender remained untouched in conscience and persisted, punishment might take an alternative form to beating, such as 'restraining [...] libertie of recreation', or 'seruice of drudgerie' such as 'the sweeping of the Schoole' (1988: A2^r, H2^r).

[18] Moreover, although discipline may have been necessary to maintain order in overcrowded classrooms, and may have been understood as producing useful citizens, this need not mean that the objectives of teachers were limited to producing docile conformists and suppressing independent thought. Mulcaster emphasises that in the pursuit of truth it is insufficient merely to accumulate quotations and examples from existing authorities,

offering 'a catalogue of names, and a multitude of sentences' to make up for 'want of sound iudgement'. Instead:

I wil reste vpon reason the best, where I finde it, the next where that failes, and coniecture is probable, to proue such thinges, as reason must paterne. If the triall be in prooffe, and experience must guide it, I will binde vpon prooffe, and let triall be the tuche. For with the alledging of authours, either to shew, what I haue read or to tuche common concordces, where any thing is to much, and nothing is enough, I meane not at all to buisie my selfe. (1581: 13)

Reason, probable conjecture, experience, and proof by trial: these are all forms of active, autonomous, and empirical thought, not mere memorisation, repetition, and deference to authority. Similarly when Kempe sets out his recommended curriculum year by year he emphasises that the pupil must move from translation and imitation to original composition. In *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* Rhodes asked the pertinent question, 'Did Shakespeare study creative writing?'. His answer, based on a detailed study of the grammar-school syllabus, was that 'literary study was directed towards creative practice', and that imitation was understood not as slavish copying, but as 'transformation [...] assimilation and re-creation' (2004: locs 695, 758). Kempe bears this out: in the upper forms, he asserts, the pupil should be able to 'assay otherwhiles, without an example of imitation, what he can do alone by his owne skill'. The objective of the curriculum is that the pupil 'before the full age of sixteene yeeres be made fit to wade without a schoolemaister, through deeper mysteries of learning' (1588: H1^r). Kempe understands his mission as training his pupils to exceed him, to go beyond the limits of their schoolroom lessons in their speaking and writing skills and in their autonomous pursuit of knowledge.

[19] Kempe also chides 'parents in these daies' who have 'more care to prouide wealth for their children, than wisdom' (1588: A2^r). In a section headed 'The Vtilitie of Schooling' he offers a satirical picture of a father who 'will rubbe his forehead' and ask why parents should 'spend their goodes and possessions about that which cannot feede the belly, nor clothe the backe, nor yet helpe a man in time of aduersitie'. Kempe's answer is that

If Dauid, Salomon, Paule, or any other of these good men should answer thee, he would say that the riches, which thou bestowest to get learning, is but drosse and dung, in comparison of the pure gold and precious pearle that is attained by learning, and so would decipher the singuler vse and fruites of learning, with such forcible and sound reasons, with such gracious and heauenly eloquence, that it would passe the skill of any man now aliue to expresse it. (1588: D4^r)

For Kempe, then, the role of education was not to procure social and financial advantage for his students, but to lead them to intellectual and spiritual benefits. As a key part of this, like Mulcaster, he understood his pedagogy as directed towards enabling his pupils to think independently and originally.

[20] We may wonder how representative Mulcaster and Kempe were. O'Day rightly points out that there were 'a multiplicity of types of school, each the product of differing traditions as well as of the interplay between these traditions and specific circumstances' (1982: 40). Yet in omitting from her account of Elizabethan education any mention of the prolific literary activity and remarkable literary achievements of the period she surely leaves a huge gap and produces a distorted picture. The gulf between the versions of an Elizabethan grammar-school education offered by historians of education and by literary critics clearly arises from the fact that they have been asking different questions. O'Day and her colleagues were asking: 'Was there an educational revolution in the Elizabethan period?', and were inclined to answer 'No', or 'Only within limits'. Literary critics, by contrast, have agreed that there was a *literary* revolution in the Elizabethan period, which has led them to ask: 'How

did this extraordinary explosion of original writing come about?', and, in particular, 'How did Shakespeare come to write as he did?', finding answers in his exposure to rhetorical training and classical literature at school. Moreover in investigation of these questions, literary critics have tended to focus on the content of the Elizabethan curriculum, whereas educational historians have concentrated on the methods of delivery, which often present to the modern reader a somewhat dismaying picture.

[21] In spite of the evidence from Mulcaster and Kempe that some schoolmasters did see the encouragement of forms of original thinking as an important part of their mission, we may need to acknowledge that some aspects of Elizabethan classroom practice which are anathema to modern progressive sensibilities were nevertheless effective as a means of imparting knowledge and skills. In particular, learning conditions which may seem to us repressive nevertheless manifestly produced later intellectual benefits for Elizabethan authors. Latin grammar and classical rhetoric were thoroughly learned; classical literature was thoroughly absorbed; all of these tools and materials became resources on which adult authors could draw, and a cultural language which they shared for the purposes of allusion, parody, recognition of rhetorical tropes, and so on. In fact there is nothing revelatory about the observation that discipline is effective in instilling knowledge and skills, even if we might object on other grounds to forms of discipline such as corporal punishment. Nor is there anything surprising in the recognition that repetitive, tedious, even apparently mindless tasks can hone skills in such a way as to support brilliant performance; we might think of musicians practising their scales. Many present-day academics may instinctively share the assumptions of historians such as O'Day, Grafton, and Jardine that rote-learning, routine, and method tend to stifle creativity and individual development, yet at the same time anecdotal evidence from our own experiences and the observed experiences of others may suggest that this is not necessarily so.

[22] Lynn Enterline in *Shakespeare's Schoolroom* (2012) offers a further intriguing but also troubling thought: that forms of psychological *damage* inflicted at grammar school prepared some Elizabethan boys to go on to great writing careers. She suggests that even those parts of the Elizabethan curriculum that we might see as most enlightened and most related to creativity, namely drama and other kinds of performance, trained boys to adopt set forms of speech and gesture, and thereby distanced the boys from themselves:

the cumulative effect of grammar school instruction in socially sanctioned language, expression, and bodily movement was to establish in students a significant detour between event and feeling, orator and the passions he imitated for the sake of persuading and pleasing others. Indeed, school training engrained what I have come to call 'habits of alterity' at the heart of schoolboy 'identity'. (7-8)

She goes on:

One of the stranger aspects of grammar school practice is that the humanist effort to discipline language and affect produced rhetorically skilled subjects whose technical proficiency in evoking assigned passions, from themselves and from an audience, meant that a boy's connection to his own feelings might become tenuous at best [...] From the perspective of the school, scholars achieved their place in their social world by being drilled in the art of feeling and conveying passions that came from somewhere else and someone else. From a psychoanalytic perspective, early modern schoolboys were trained in techniques that distanced them from their own experience in both language and time. (29)

Enterline suggests that such internal self-division was a form of psychological harm but at the same time an essential skill for future actors and creators of fictions, creating the ability

to occupy and move between multiple viewpoints and subject positions.

[23] In taking further the perception that the relation between schoolroom experience and later creativity was a complex one, we might also consider Elizabethan authors as making use of the linguistic skills and literary knowledge offered by the grammar-school curriculum while reacting against its authoritarian methodologies. Rebecca W. Bushnell, in a subtle account of the 'culture of teaching' in sixteenth-century England, finds that what we broadly designate 'humanism' was never a consistent ideology and had inherent contradictions (1996: 19). In particular, corporal punishment, whether actual or threatened, was not necessarily successful in instilling obedience, and might rather have provoked defiance and nascent political awareness: 'At the core of arguments about flogging we [...] find the early modern discourse of political authority, monarchy, tyranny and resistance, with the schoolroom a highly charged site for defining and acting out different poses of authority and resistance' (34). She goes on to discuss the 'struggle for sovereignty' between master and pupil, concluding that 'humanist education, in its formative stages in sixteenth-century England, could generate authoritarianism and resistance simultaneously' (67, 74). Jeff Dolven develops a related model of the questioning and critical pupil in his 2007 book *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance*, arguing that from the 1560s onwards there was a rising tide of dissatisfaction with humanist pedagogy, not least because its students had 'time to age into disillusionment'. This leads him to propose that in works such as *Euphues*, the *Arcadias*, and *The Faerie Queene* 'the very possibility of literary didacticism' is 'emptied out: their writers lose faith in the idea that literature can teach, because they cannot free their books – their teaching books – from a culture of teaching that they take to be compromised, even bankrupt' (8, 10-11).

[24] If we look not at Shakespeare's use of rhetoric or classical allusion, but at his direct representations of schoolmasters and schoolboys, the impression we form is of a pupil who was less than enthusiastic and not particularly compliant. Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* is hardly an inspiring figure; while in *As You Like It* we have the famous description of

the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. (II. 7. 145-7)

Particularly striking in relation to the issues considered here is the scene in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* between the Welsh parson, Sir Hugh Evans, and the Pages' young son William. It is hard to resist speculation that in giving this schoolboy his own name, Shakespeare was at least partly looking back to his own childhood. Evans takes William through some Latin exercises, including double translation, in which the pupil translates from Latin into English and then back into Latin:

EVANS What is *lapis*, William?
WILLIAM A stone.
EVANS And what is a stone, William?
WILLIAM A pebble.
EVANS No, it is *lapis*; I pray you remember in your prain. (IV. 1. 26-31)

This dialogue is on one level a simple joke but can also be read in more complex ways. Does William reply 'pebble' out of stupidity, or out of cleverness? He might have misunderstood the nature of the exercise, thinking that Evans wants him to demonstrate facility in *copia*, the exercise taught from Erasmus's text-book, *De Copia*, of varying expression and saying a thing in as many different ways as possible (Mack 2002: 31-2; Rhodes 2004: locs 706-12). Alternatively, it may be that his mind spontaneously flits sideways to think laterally; or it may be that he is deliberately and subversively mocking Evans. It is by no means clear which of them has the upper hand.

[25] The master then takes William through the declension of the demonstrative pronoun *hic*, and they reach the genitive plural, which William dutifully recites as '*horum, harum, horum*' (IV. 1. 53). Mistress Quickly, thinking that William is calling someone named Jenny a whore, scolds Evans: 'You do ill to teach the child such words' (IV. 1. 57). The joke is of course about her characteristic slow-wittedness and propensity to find *double-entendres* where none are intended; but it is also about how the humanist education being bestowed upon the sons of the middling sort is equipping them with forms of knowledge unfamiliar to the older generation, taking them into new intellectual and social territory and giving them forms of mastery over their elders and 'betters'. At the end of the scene William's mother says, slightly anxiously perhaps, 'He is a better scholar than I thought he was' (IV. 1. 71). This overtaking of the older generation by the young might include not only parents and their friends, but also the schoolmaster himself. Throughout this scene Evans does not seem significantly more learned or intelligent than his young charge, and there is good reason to think that as William grows up he will become the more intellectually advanced of the two. Even when William forgets or mistakes his answers, these diversions seem like implicit comments on the tedium and restriction of the whole catechetical exercise. William can march through his Latin grammar successfully when he puts his mind to it, but much of the time his mind is wandering elsewhere, presumably to more interesting territory, such as when he will be released to play.

[26] The scene between Evans and William readily conforms to Dolven's model of Elizabethan writers looking back on their educational experiences in a spirit of disillusionment and cynicism. Yet at the same time what happened to them at school, or rather how they interacted with the forms of instruction that they encountered at school, was clearly a formative experience for them as authors. Rhodes offers helpful insight into the complex relationship between what was taught and what was learned, what was offered or inflicted by schoolmasters and what was taken away by pupils: 'Essentially, what Shakespeare was taught was a process. What he *learned* was that the process could be absorbed while abandoning most of the rules associated with it'. He concludes that 'Shakespeare, along with the entire Elizabethan literary renaissance, to which he is central, was the product of a creative abuse of the Tudor education system' (2004: locs 846, 1053, and see 1435).

[27] In a different context, Stephen Greenblatt has sought to locate one of the origins of the Renaissance in a single event which he calls a 'swerve', or, borrowing a term from Lucretius, a *clinamen*, which Greenblatt defines as 'an unexpected, unpredictable movement of matter [...], an unforeseen deviation from the direct trajectory' (2011: 7). Greenblatt's swerve is the rediscovery in 1417 by the book-collector Poggio Bracciolini of a manuscript of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (*Of the Nature of Things*) in a German monastery, ultimately eventuating in the dissemination of Lucretius's ideas across Renaissance Europe. Greenblatt describes Bracciolini's extraction of the manuscript from the shelf as a 'key moment' which was 'muffled and almost invisible, tucked away behind walls in a remote place. There were no heroic gestures, no observers keenly recording the great event for posterity, no signs in heaven or on earth that everything had changed forever' (12). As Willy Maley has observed, this concept of a swerve has much in common with the well-known idea from chaos theory that the flutter of a butterfly's wing can set off a chain of events which has epic consequences many continents away (2011). Whether this particular moment was indeed, as Greenblatt claims, a swerve which ended the Middle Ages, initiated the Renaissance, and explains 'How the World Became Modern' (the subtitle of the US edition of the book) has been vigorously debated (e.g. Burrow 2011, Hinch 2012, Monfasani 2012). Nevertheless it might be helpful to appropriate and adapt Greenblatt's model of the unseen and local origins of historical change in order to imagine numerous 'swerves' up and down Elizabethan England, in various cities and provincial towns, as individual grammar-school boys who would go on to be notable writers not only imbibed instruction from their school-

masters, but also resisted their authority and strayed in unregulated and ungovernable mental directions.

[28] It is a commonplace of early modern studies to observe that a spread of literacy motivated by the pious goals of improving direct access to Scripture eventuated in a growing reading public for all kinds of secular literature, some of it far from pious. Similarly with grammar-school education, even if the professed intention was often the training up of dutiful citizens, the skills and knowledge conferred did not necessarily have this outcome – indeed in some cases manifestly had unintended and unexpected consequences. To mention only a couple of the most obvious examples: Marlowe's schoolmasters can hardly have anticipated that he would write *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*; Shakespeare's schoolmasters can hardly have understood themselves as preparing him to write *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Here is a means of reconciling the high claims made for Elizabethan grammar-school education by literary critics with the more limited and critical accounts of it given by educational historians: incipient writers at once learned valuable skills for their trade at school, and exceeded or even resisted or rejected lessons learned at school. We might return to a telling phrase from William Kempe: he understood his mission as a schoolmaster as making his pupils 'fit to wade without a schoolemaister, through deeper mysteries of learning' (1588: H1r). In this many schoolmasters of the period evidently succeeded. The sheer number of Elizabethan authors who attended grammar schools points to a connection between a grammar-school education and later literary achievement, but this connection must have been complicated, not necessarily a smooth transition from skills and training enthusiastically imbibed at school to later literary success. Forms of psychological damage inflicted at school might have been paradoxically productive of great writing; and the repressive and tedious aspects of Elizabethan pedagogy might have created habits of resistance and 'swerving' that were also conducive to later literary originality. Thinking about just what it was that happened in the Elizabethan classroom, and the various processes by which this might have been connected to the later literary achievements of former grammar-school pupils, highlights the extreme complexity of the relations between education and creativity in general, a continuing issue for us today.

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APPENDIX

Educational backgrounds of leading authors born and/or educated during the reign of Elizabeth I

All information from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-16),

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/>> [accessed 5 April 2016].

a. Authors educated at grammar schools who did not proceed to university or the Inns of Court

Thomas Dekker, b. c.1572: no record of parents; no record of education, but 'his writing strongly suggests that he had a grammar school education' (ODNB).

Ben Jonson, b. 1572: stepson of bricklayer; attended Westminster School. May have been admitted to St John's College, Cambridge but withdrawn after a few weeks for financial reasons, to work with his stepfather.

Thomas Kyd, bap. 1558: son of scrivener; entered Merchant Taylors' School in 1565.

William Shakespeare, bap. 1564: son of glover; probably attended King's School, Stratford-upon-Avon.

b. Authors educated at grammar schools who did proceed to university or the Inns of Court

Robert Greene, bap. 1558: son of saddler or cordwainer/innkeeper; probably attended free grammar school at Norwich. Probably matriculated at St John's College, Cambridge; proceeded to MA at Clare College, Cambridge; also awarded an MA by Oxford.

Fulke Greville, b. 1554: son of well-connected Warwickshire landowner; entered Shrewsbury School in 1564. Matriculated at Jesus College, Cambridge but left without a degree.

Thomas Lodge, b. 1558: father was grocer, Lord Mayor of London, bankrupt; entered Merchant Taylors' School in 1571 as 'poore scholar'. Took BA at Trinity College, Oxford, then proceeded to Lincoln's Inn.

John Lyly, b. 1554: grandson of one of the authors of the standard Latin grammar; son of a registrar (minor ecclesiastical official); probably educated at the King's School, Canterbury. Took BA and MA at Magdalen College, Oxford.

Christopher Marlowe, bap. 1564: son of shoemaker; entered King's School Canterbury as poor scholar c. 1578. Took BA at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, on a Parker Scholarship.

George Peele, bap. 1556: son of clerk of Christ's Hospital; educated at Christ's Hospital. Took BA and MA at Christ Church, Oxford.

Philip Sidney, b. 1554: son of Lord President of the Council in the Marches; attended Shrewsbury School from 1564. Attended Christ Church, Oxford but did not take a degree.

Edmund Spenser, b. 1552?: parentage uncertain; attended Merchant Taylors' School as poor scholar. Took BA and MA at Pembroke College, Cambridge as a sizar (poor scholar performing servants' duties).

John Webster, b. 1578-80: son of coachmaker; probably attended Merchant Taylors' School. Proceeded to Middle Temple.

c. Cases where pre-university education unknown (but progression to university makes grammar-school education likely)

Samuel Daniel, b. 1562/3: early life uncertain (but matriculated at Oxford in 1581)

Thomas Heywood, b. c. 1573: early education not known (but matriculated at Cambridge as a pensioner in 1591)

John Marston, bap. 1576: matriculated at Oxford 1592; entered residence at Middle Temple 1595

Thomas Middleton, bap. 1580: early education not known (but matriculated at Oxford in 1598)

d. Authors not educated at grammar schools

George Chapman, b. 1559/60: son of yeoman; spent early adulthood in household of Sir Ralph Sadler

John Donne, b. 1572: son of ironmonger; educated privately. Matriculated at Oxford in 1584; admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1592.

Michael Drayton, b. 1563: son of butcher or tanner; claimed to owe his education to patronage of Goodere family.

Thomas Nashe, bap. 1567: son of clergyman; probably educated by father. Matriculated as a sizar at St John's College, Cambridge in 1582.

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